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WITCHCRAFT AND DEMONISM OF THE MODERN IROQUOIS.

THE Iroquois, especially those who hold to the old religion, still believe in witchcraft. I speak more particularly of the Onondagas, for it is principally among them that my observations have been made.

An Onondaga, about fifty years of age, pointed out to me, quite recently, an old woman living on the reservation whom he believes to be a witch. He is quite convinced of it, for some years ago he was going home one night about eleven o'clock, when, just as he was passing around a wooded hill, he saw this woman ahead of him. She was walking in the same direction, and so did not at first see him. Her hair hung down over her eyes, and she blew from her mouth flames of different colors to light her path. As she did this her hair was licked by the flames and blown up from her face. He followed her, and when near the council-house began to run. She ran around the building and along the fence until she came to a long log house (no longer standing) in which witches were said to congregate, and as she reached the door she once more blew flames from her mouth, and disappeared within. As my informant "was not feeling well, and his brother was very sick," he was much worried by what he had seen. He thought that a person could learn to blow flames from the mouth in this way. This woman, some said, had initiated her husband. It is necessary to swallow a kind of snake, after which persons become "wild" (*i. e.*, witches, *Hun-dat-na + s'*). Witches roam about at night, working charms and spells, at times taking the form of dogs, hogs, and turkeys. They destroy those whom they dislike by sending small bundles of straw wound round with hair, which have the property of passing into the body of the victim and killing him. A young man, twenty-three years old, told me last year that he "had seen witches in Canada;" that is, he had seen lights moving in the woods, and supposed them to be the flames blown from the witches' mouths. They would shine for a few seconds in one spot, then disappear, to be seen again, after a short interval, farther on.

The foregoing is sufficient to show that the belief in witches has not yet disappeared. As to their punishment (death being the penalty), I am inclined to think that during the present century this has rarely been attempted.

However, an old man, who had the account from an eye-witness, told me the following story of a double execution at Oneida, which happened, he thought, about sixty years ago: After much illness and many deaths, which could not be accounted for, a council was

being held in the "meeting-house," when two old women came in, and, standing in the middle of the floor, addressed the assembly: "You are all acting like fools. Here you are, holding a council without knowing what you are talking about. It is we who have caused all the illness and death, — we and another old woman who will probably be here soon. We have killed these persons, and now, if you wish to kill us, we are ready." They had, they declared, worked a charm, and made a "poison" by putting hair into a "stone bowl," probably a bowl-shaped hollow or pot-hole in the rocky bed of the creek. The hair had changed into snakes, which had caused the trouble. This "poison" could be destroyed ("killed") by building a large fire of soft wood over the spot. While the fire was burning no one should approach it. They gave this information voluntarily. One of the chiefs now asked if any one was willing to act as executioner. After a pause, a man seated far back in one corner of the building said that he would undertake to kill them if all were agreed, and he thought that he could do so neatly and quickly. All were of the opinion that the women should die, and the killing was done by hitting them on the back of the head with a heavy "hickory cane" or club. They were, however, "hard to kill" (witches are remarkable for their tenacity of life), and required to be "hit a good many times" before they lay entirely motionless. After this a search was made for the "stone bowl" and snakes, which were found and destroyed, as had been advised by the witches before their death. A large fire of bass-wood logs was built, and when the heat became intense there was an explosion, probably of the heated stone, or, in the words of the narrator, "it" burst. The charm, and everything connected with it, was thus destroyed.¹ I was told last autumn that an old man had been put to death for witchcraft on one of the Canadian Iroquois reservations, about seven years before. He was killed by men who lay in wait for him and shot him from an ambush. "What was done by the dead man's friends?" I asked. "Nothing; they thought he had been at that business long enough." "And the white people?" "They did n't know it."

I might add that not only is the existence of witches not doubted by most Iroquois, but individuals may still be found who consider, or pretend to consider, that they themselves are, or have been, guilty of witchcraft. In fact, during a general council of the Six Nations, held in August, 1888, of which the open confession of sins was one of the striking features, a chief of the Onondagas confessed that he had practised witchcraft, but, becoming penitent, had reformed.²

¹ This may be another version of a somewhat similar story related in Clark's *Onondaga*.

² The public confession of sins would seem to be a reflection of former Chris-

The power of bewitching appears to belong only to those who are witches by profession, — to those who have gone through the initiation or preparation necessary in order to become a witch. Some say that the candidate must promise to sacrifice, as the price of his tuition, a member of his own family, as a sister, brother, or cousin, before he may become master of the art.

As soon as the power of witchcraft is obtained, the individual seems to be able, by mere volition, to injure his victim ; nor do charms and spells appear, in most cases, necessary. If a dispute occurs, in which a witch threatens or curses his antagonist, he has only to be in earnest in what he says to cause the malediction to take effect. If the person bewitched is able to anticipate the evil, or can discover the guilty one, he may make an appeal, through a third person, to have the malediction revoked. An instance of this kind occurred under my own observation as recently as last August. A woman, whose child had unwittingly offended the wife of a neighbor (a reputed witch), was caused much anxiety by the fear that, in retaliation, some member of her family might be bewitched. In order to prevent this she sent a friend to tell the witch that she was mistaken in accusing the child, and to ask her not to think harshly of any of the family. The witch, being notified in this way that he is discovered, is presumably forced to discontinue his evil practices, for fear of exposure and punishment. If, however, the cause of the trouble is not suspected, or is discovered too late, the victim is doomed, unless a cure can be effected by ordinary remedies, which is usually impossible.

Charms do not seem to be in common use, though the St. Regis Indians are said to make a small wooden peg, which they drive into the ground, or into a log or tree. The victim lives as long as the peg lasts, but wastes away gradually as it decays, and dies when it has rotted completely. Tobacco sometimes is burned in a fire, the witch meanwhile addressing it in a low tone, and exhorting it to efficacy. This seems to possess something of the character of a spell, and although other spells are probably used, I am unable to give any examples. It is equally possible that this may be some form of sacrificial offering, but if so I was unsuccessful in my endeavors to establish the fact.

Witches are supposed to meet at night in the woods and bushes, taking temporarily the form of dogs or other animals to better con-

tian teaching, as such an idea appears entirely foreign to the doctrines of most Indian religions. It was in all probability brought into practice as a part of the new faith introduced by Ga-nĩ-a-tai/'h-yu, the last great prophet, while the holding of long strings of white wampum by the penitent during the confession may have been suggested by the rosary of the early missionaries.

ceal themselves. For this reason the howling of dogs at night and lights moving in the woods are looked upon with suspicion and dread.

The enumeration of the above facts suffices to prove that a strong belief in witches exists at the present time.

In addition to witches, these Indians believe that there exists a race of supernatural evil beings or demons, whom they call *Hat-do'-i*, *Hoⁿ-do'-i* in the plural.

These *Hoⁿ-do'-i* afflict human beings with illness and other misfortunes, but, notwithstanding their hostility to mankind, they can be propitiated and persuaded not only to withdraw the evil they themselves have caused, but also to grant aid and protection against the witches, to whom they appear to be antagonistic. They are said to inhabit a cave, which opens at the stone quarries on the north edge of the reservation, and extends through a narrow cleft in the rock to a similar cavern near Jamesville, N. Y.¹

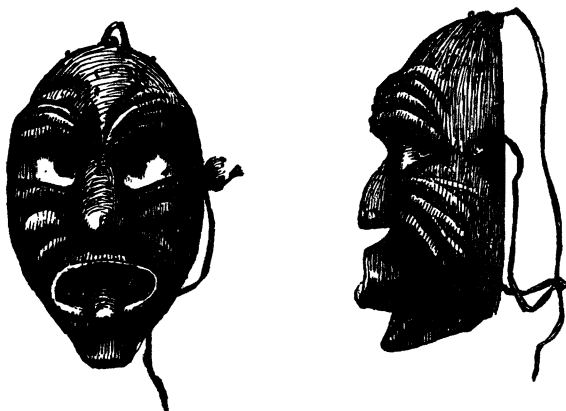
In this cave, according to the Indian belief, are stone images supposed to represent the *Hoⁿ-do'-i*, and the whole inner atmosphere of the place is charged with a malign influence. I was assured by an Onondaga woman that an old man and some boys visited the cave one Sunday afternoon. They remained there several hours ; so long, in fact, that when at last they emerged their candles were nearly consumed. One of the boys for days afterward was annoyed by a swollen face, the swelling being so great that his eyes were almost closed. This was ascribed to the resentment of the devils. But as I have already stated, these evil beings, if flattered and humored, become less troublesome, and will even withdraw for a time the evil or sickness they have caused. Dances in their honor ("devil-dances") and offerings of tobacco and food are the usual means adopted to pacify them. The dancers, masked and attired in the most uncouth and tattered garments, imitate by weird groanings, grunting, and eccentric movements the actions of the demons. Their masks (*Ga-guⁿ-sa*) are of several kinds, principally of wood, but some of husk, buffalo-skin, muslin, and occasionally the coarse papier maché masks of the toy-shops. The wooden masks are the most interesting, often artistic, and very hideous, and are held in the highest esteem, some of them having been in use for from twenty to one hundred years. The older ones are by far the more characteristic, but there are comparatively few of them now in existence. The eyes are usually made of discs of tin or brass set into the wood, while the expression of the mouth is occasionally heightened by the addition of hog's teeth or chips of bone or shell. A wig of horse-tail,

¹ I believe a small cave actually exists at the quarries, but have never visited it. The entrance is now incumbered by the débris of blasting and excavating.

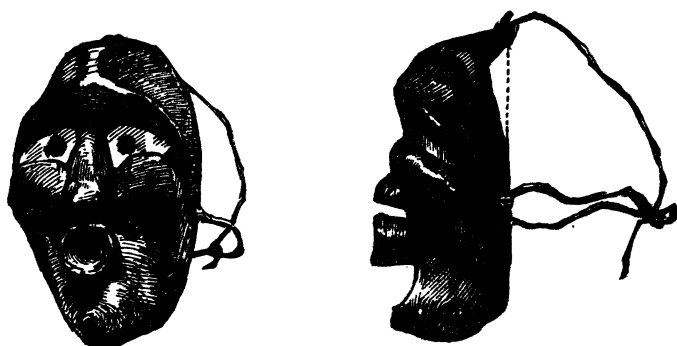


Hat-do'-i, or Dancer in costume, with mask, staff, and turtle-shell rattle.
 From a sketch made at the dance of January 14, 1888.

a strip of buffalo-robe, or a braid of corn-husks is sometimes fastened to the mask when in use, and helps to disguise the wearer as well as to make the general effect more frightful. The rest of the costume consists of old, torn clothes, corn-husks, old buffalo-robcs, and even at times articles of female attire. Baskets, pans, bundles of cloth, or other bulky objects are stuffed under the garments, with cords tied around the body above and below them, so as to produce the appearance of humps or deformities. In fact, any device is used which contributes to make the disguise unsightly. Heavy moccasins, made of old boot-legs, are generally worn in winter. A rattle, *Us-ta-wā's'-ha*, made of the shell of a snapping-turtle, with the head, neck, and entire skin except the legs and tail, is carried by some of the dancers. Others carry clubs or rough staffs, four or five feet long,



No. 1. Onondaga mask. Said by former owner to be about twenty years old. 11 inches in length, red, with teeth and eyes of tin. Front and profile.



No. 2. Onondaga mask. 11½ inches long; color, red, with small moustache, eyebrows, and a small spot on end of chin painted in black; tin eyes. Said by former owner to be about thirty years old. Front and profile.

and from an inch and a half to two inches in diameter. A few carry both staffs and rattles, or substitute for the club a wooden pestle, such as is used in grinding corn. Formerly the pestles figured more commonly than at present.

During the "New Year's dances" there are three occasions on which the masks are used, or, in other words, three "devil-dances," or dances in honor of the *Ho'-do'-i*. Two precede the "burning of the white dog."¹

¹ The Onondagas still speak of "burning the white dog," when referring to the ceremonies in conjunction with which the white dog was formerly sacrificed. As a matter of fact, however, residents on the reservation, both Indian and white, assert that no dog has been burnt for seven or eight years, though they still burn in the council-house stove the other offerings, tobacco, wampum, bead-work, ribbons, etc., which formerly accompanied that sacrifice. Last January (1888) I was

These are called "scaring witches," the witches being exorcised by the aid of the *Hoⁿ-do'-ĭ*. The third dance is held some ten days later. In January, 1888, the first two were held on the evenings of Saturday the 14th and Sunday the 15th. On the first of these occasions (January 14th) the people began to assemble in the council-house at about seven o'clock p. m., and for the first hour or two the time was occupied in "telling dreams." A person having had an unusual dream, one which he judges of sufficient importance to affect his pleasure or success in life, rises to his feet, advances to the centre of the floor, and makes the fact known to the assembly. For each dream the dreamer must be "helped" by his friends, who promise him in turn gifts of various objects, usually food. He may have dreamed of a certain article, the possession of which, as a gift, is necessary to his happiness, and his friends are expected to guess until they have found out what that article is; then he who has made the right guess is bound in honor to make a present of the desired object to the dreamer on the following day. One friend will perhaps suggest dried corn, or a slice of pork. If neither of these prove satisfactory, the dreamer answers "*Hi'-ya*" ("No"). Other friends will propose, successively, apples, potatoes, bread, cabbage, etc., until the article which the dreamer is supposed to have in mind is guessed, when he answers "*Ni-a-wăⁿ'-ha*" ("Thank you"), and the men cry out "*Yu-go-năⁿ, Hwa-hwa, hu-a+a++*," the last syllable very much prolonged, falling in cadence, finally growing fainter and dying away. Before this cry has been finished by the men the dreamer begins to chant, walking back and forth across the council-house floor with a slow, measured tread, while those ranged along the wall keep time to the step with a steady "*Hĕh-hĕh-hĕh-hĕh*," and by slightly tapping the floor with the sole of the foot, until the song is finished and the dreamer takes his seat, when the cry "*Hwa-hwa, hu-a+a++*" is again repeated, and all is silent until the next dreamer rises. Some, after accepting an offer of a present for one dream, will say "*O'-ĕs*" (a word seeming to have nearly the meaning of the French *encore*), which I should translate in this case "another," signifying that a second present for another dream is desired. The song is sometimes omitted, but the exclamation "*Yu-go-năⁿ, Hwa-hwa, hu-a+a++*" always follows the "*Ni-a-wăⁿ'-ha*," which accompanies the acceptance of a present. After several persons have risen and accepted promises of presents, two or three young men, armed

present during the whole New Year's feast, and no white dog was burnt. Many of the Onondagas said that they had not been able to find a suitable dog. One woman told me that she thought that omitting the white dog, and burning only the other objects, "looked better," and I am inclined to think (though few of them would be willing to acknowledge it) that this is the general opinion among them.

with guns and accompanied by a crier, go out of the council-house and discharge the pieces in the air, toward the south or in the direction of the moon, immediately after which the crier calls out in a loud voice the names of those who have told dreams. After this had continued for some time, the dancers, masked and dressed as already described, approached, and began to rattle their clubs and turtle-shells against the sides of the council-house, the noise becoming louder and the scraping and thumping more vigorous as they made the circuit of the building, accompanying their pounding with a low, grunting exclamation, "*Haⁿ-haⁿ, — haⁿ-haⁿ, haⁿ-haⁿ,*" which, coming from behind the wooden masks, seemed quite unearthly. As the group reached the entrance the uproar became almost deafening, until, with a sudden push, the door was thrown open, and the dancers entered, creeping and crawling on all fours, writhing like cripples, and shaking their rattles and staffs along the floor until they reached the middle of the room and stood up.

Before the arrival of the dancers, or *Hoⁿ-do'-i*,¹ tobacco, in pieces "just big enough for a chew," had been collected from the assembled crowd by a man acting as master of ceremonies, who now distributed them to the dancers (one to each), and then taking a rattle from one of the "devils," and sitting astride a bench, sang the accompaniment, beating time to the dance by striking the edge of the rattle with quick, double blows on the bench before him.

The dance lasted but a short time, and after it was over the performers went about the council-house as they pleased, staring through their masks at the women and frightening the children. Occasionally the master of ceremonies would call one or two of them aside, and, giving them each a piece of tobacco, order them to dance in some peculiar way, to imitate various animals or locomotives, skaters, etc. The dance, in this respect, has evidently been much modified by contact with civilization, and after the first dance, in which everything was done seriously, there seemed to be a general inclination to be ludicrous and trivial. This continued for some time, the "dream-telling" being kept up meanwhile, and toward eleven o'clock everyone left the council-house and went home. The ceremonies on the following night, Sunday, January 15th, being similar in all important respects, do not need a separate description.

The dance of Thursday, January 26th, was more interesting, but was, properly speaking, a "medicine dance," in which the *Hoⁿ-do'-i* were not asked to help the people against the witches, but were expected, in view of the honor shown them, to withdraw the sickness for which they themselves were responsible.

¹ As the dancers are dressed and masked to represent *Hon-do'-i*, the word *Hat-do'-i* is also used in speaking of them.

During the early part of the day the dancers went from house to house, dancing for the cure of those who could not leave home. In the afternoon, toward three o'clock, the people gathered in the council-house to await the coming of the *Hoⁿ-do'-i*. Two old women were cooking a kettle of dried corn, beans, and slices of pork over the fire at the women's end of the room, for on this, as on other occasions, one end is occupied by the men and the other by the women. Food for feasts is always prepared at the women's end of the house, excepting bread and cakes, which are furnished from the private houses. During this time the devils would appear occasionally before the door, the people within and without giving way immediately for them, and the "head devil" would push open the door suddenly and enter with a bound, to see if the feast were ready. When this had happened several times the food was declared cooked, and the whole company of dancers entered and took seats near the middle of the room. The head chief then stood up and made a speech, in which he addressed the dancers as "*A-gwe'-gi*," "All." Then proceeding to the stove, he threw tobacco into the fire, and lifting off the pot full of food gave it to the "head devil," who took it and walked out, followed by the others. While they were gone a number of benches were arranged in a semicircle in front of the women's stove. On this semicircle of benches those who were suffering from disease or sickness now seated themselves, to the number of thirty or forty. When the devils had eaten the food they returned to the council-house, and all save one (the "head devil," whose duty it was to guard the door) went to the stove, and with a great deal of grunting and groaning, "*Haⁿ-haⁿ, haⁿ-haⁿ*," ran their hands through the ashes on the hearth, and then started in single file around the half-circle of benches, each *Hat-do'-i* in turn rubbing ashes upon the head of each of the sick persons. The action consists in rubbing the hands quickly on the head, and then blowing upon it two or three times.

After this the devils sat down, and a man with a turtle-shell rattle took a seat on a separate bench, facing the invalids, where he sang an accompaniment, and with the rattle beat time for the following dance. A woman somewhat beyond middle age, apparently appointed for that purpose, led out to the nearer end of the seats one of the sick women, while at the same time a man led forth one of the devils to dance with the patient. The pair, having danced facing each other to the other end of the row of benches, resumed their seats, and another couple took their place, a sick woman being brought forward as before by the old woman, and a devil by the man already mentioned. These two also danced across the floor, and upon taking their seats were followed by others, until each sick woman had danced with one of the devils. Then all in the council-house danced, in an

irregular crowd, around the inside of the building. During these ceremonies the head demon had stood with his back against the door to prevent persons going out, and I was afterward told that if any one present refused to take part in the final, general dance, the *Hoⁿ-do'-i* "would throw him down, put ashes on him," and inflict various indignities upon him. The medicine dancing was now over, and the crowd was allowed to go and come as it chose. The group of sick persons that had occupied the benches consisted of men and women, old and young, but only the women danced, as I have described, each with a separate *Hat-do-i*.

In addition to those already mentioned, the Onondagas also have smaller masks, or maskoids, three or four inches long, made like the larger ones, which probably serve as amulets, though I am not certain as to this.

It is believed that masks left long unused and neglected about the house sometimes become the source of illness, or at least of serious annoyance. I was told of a recent case, of a woman whose mouth began to grow crooked, and finally became badly twisted. This was caused by the resentment of a certain devil or devils because a mask which had long lain forgotten in the house was not danced with and shown proper attention. However, the mask having been used in a dance, and the necessary offerings of tobacco made, the woman's mouth soon became straight again.

On one occasion I was about to leave the reservation with a mask that I had obtained, when an Indian friend asked me if I had any tobacco. I gave him a small quantity, about half of which he wrapped in a piece of calico and tied to the mask, at one side, where the string for holding it on the head is attached. Then taking the rest, he threw it into the fire, a little at a time, and at intervals of a second or two. He told me that I should do this every three months, and should at the same time renew the tobacco in the calico bag. By taking these precautions I would be free from the frights and illness that the mask might otherwise cause me, when deprived of the dancing and feasting in which it was accustomed to take part.

It may be worthy of remark that the tobacco burnt as an offering to the *Hoⁿ-do'-i*, and in other religious ceremonies, is not the ordinary tobacco of commerce, but the original tobacco of the Iroquois, which they still cultivate for that purpose. I have not yet been able to ascertain whether this plant is identical with that (*N. quadrivalvis*?) which the Prince of Neuwied cites as being raised in his time, and used only for similar purposes and for smoking on solemn occasions by the Mandans and Meunitarris of the upper Missouri.

De Cost Smith.

NOTE. — PRESENT CONDITION OF THE ONONDAGAS. For the benefit of such readers as may be unacquainted with the Onondagas and their present condition, it may be well to state that they occupy at present a small reservation in Onondaga County, in one of the best farming regions in the State of New York. They number about six hundred, according to the testimony of witnesses before the assembly committee, at the recent investigation, as reported in the newspapers. Of these, perhaps two thirds should be counted as Onondagas, the remainder being members of other nations of the Iroquois confederacy, especially Oneidas and Mohawks. They may be considered civilized, as they are self-supporting and fairly good farmers. Their houses, which are principally "frame," though some are of hewn logs, are comfortably furnished, and many of them contain sewing-machines, organs, and other articles of furniture which might be classed as luxuries. There are two churches, a school, several shops, a council-house, temperance society, with building for lodge meetings, and a good brass band. They show remarkable aptness for music, both vocal and instrumental, while not a few compose tunes of no mean merit. In fact, their condition would, I think, compare favorably with that of the peasantry of most European countries.

When, in addition to this, it is remembered that they live within seven miles of the city of Syracuse, where many of them go almost daily, and are surrounded by a prosperous white population, it seems remarkable that even the old party, or "pagans," as they are usually called, should still retain so many of their ancient practices, though it should be distinctly understood that the Christian portion of the tribe do not in any way take part in the ceremonies described, although many of them believe in witchcraft.

Still, to a casual visitor, nothing of a barbarous nature is visible, and it is only after long acquaintance with them that it is possible to gain information concerning the rites and ceremonies which they know to be considered, not only sinful and absurd, but shameful and indecent.

Onondaga has long been regarded as the capital of the Iroquois confederacy, all general councils being held there (though of late years there have been exceptions to this rule). This has given the tribe great influence and a deep confidence in its old religion and government, which has probably done much toward preserving ancient traditions and customs.